

Sandinista Predicts Rebel Rout Soon

By LARRY ROHTER

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President Daniel Ortega Saavedra of Nicaragua said yesterday that the military situation in his country had swung sharply in favor of the Sandinista Army and predicted that his forces would decisively defeat anti-Government rebels "in the next few months."

Mr. Ortega also said that the imminence of a "strategic victory" over the United States-supported rebels had been behind his announcement of the suspension of civil liberties in Nicaragua last week. Such steps were necessary, he said, to deny the anti-Government guerrillas a chance to regroup when they were "on the verge" of being eliminated.

"When we have victory within reach of our hands we are not going to permit that it be denied us by a counteroffensive by the Pentagon and the C.I.A." Mr. Ortega said in an interview in Manhattan. "The state of emergency has been declared fundamentally to combat the possibility of the contras opening an internal front."

The remarks came as a striking change of tone for Mr. Ortega, who in the past has consistently offered grim assessments of the international and domestic challenges the Nicaraguan revolution faces and on several occasions has publicly predicted that an invasion of his country by the United States was in the works.

In New York for U.N. Ceremonies

But in an hourlong review of Nicaragua's military, political and economic situation yesterday, Mr. Ortega, who is in New York for ceremonies marking the 40th anniversary of the United Nations, demonstrated a confidence and optimism that he attributed to improvements in the Sandinista Army's position "compared to a few months ago."

"We've got them beat, got them defeated, demoralized and disjointed," he said of the rebel forces. "But we have to maintain the offensive in order to guarantee their strategic defeat. We can't let them come up for air."

That evaluation differs substantially from views expressed recently by leaders of the main armed rebel group, the Nicaraguan Democratic Force. They have pointed to operations in central provinces, an influx of new recruits and substantial new arms shipments as signs of strength and have predicted heavy fighting during the coming dry season.

Mr. Ortega also seemed to discount the impact of United States help to the rebel forces, both the \$27 million in "nonlethal" logistical aid that is already in the pipeline and any overt military assistance that could be approved in the future. He said that the Sandinista Army was strong enough to win on the field of battle regardless of what Washington does and that he hoped such a victory would encourage the Reagan Administration to negotiate some sort of mutual security agreement with his Government.

Mr. Ortega said that his declaration of a state of emergency on Oct. 15 was an attempt to use "formal legal mechanisms to smash any attempt at terrorist activity" by what he portrayed as a "desperate" coalition of rebel sympathizers and American intelligence agencies.

Mr. Ortega said he knew that the suspension of civil rights would hurt Nicaragua's image abroad, but argued that his Government could not afford to act otherwise at such a decisive moment.

"We prefer to pay a political cost at this moment," he said, "than to pay a higher cost, which would be the prolongation of this war, including the possibility that the mercenary forces could succeed in recomposing themselves."